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State Department review completed

December 26, 1950

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Forthcoming Look Article on U.S. Intelligence

Doug Heck brought to my office this afternoon Mr. Steven P. Nagel, whom he introduced as a researcher for Richard Wilson, a staff writer for Look magazine. Nagel had been assisting Wilson in the preparation of an article on U.S. intelligence which is scheduled for publication in the February 13 issue. He is also a candidate for a position in BI awaiting security clearance, and it was through this connection that he had brought to Heck the galley proofs of the forthcoming article. Heck suggested that I might be interested in seeing the article and Nagel readily agreed to bring it over.

I read the article in Nagel's presence. The general theme was that the United States had increased its expenditures for intelligence from about \$3 million per year prior to Pearl Harbor to \$300 million at the present time and now had 25,000-35,000 employees in the intelligence field. Despite all this, however, U.S. intelligence was still ineffective and while it had had isolated successes here and there (the breaking of the Japanese codes was cited), its record was by and large one of repeated failures. The bulk of the article was taken up with a recitation of alleged cases in point, including Bogota, the Chinese offensive last month and all the other standard illustrations with which I am familiar.

I told Mr. Nagel, in substance, that I assumed that Look's motive in running the article was a worthy one, namely to improve U.S. intelligence; that I assumed also that the article was based on open sources and that he had done his research well. I made it clear, however, that I was neither confirming nor denying any of the facts alleged.

*Steven Nagel*  
I went on to say that it was my general view, and that of every other intelligence officer known to me, that publicity, whether good or bad, could only do harm

to intelligence

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to intelligence through making what is already an extremely hard job even more difficult. I said that whatever effect the article might have in this country, it would do us harm abroad and in two principal ways. First, it is a standard Soviet propaganda line that the United States is making a massive espionage effort against the Russian orbit. I felt sure that the Russians would lose no time in picking up and propagating this apparent confirmation from a reputable American publication. I felt that this could only hamper our efforts to gain support for U.S. policy abroad. Secondly, and more important, from the intelligence point of view, the effect of Russian propaganda use of the article could only be to alert further the Soviet and Satellite population to the danger of foreign espionage and this in turn made our intelligence efforts to penetrate the Iron Curtain that much more difficult.

Mr. Nagel indicated that he had not previously considered these arguments, said that he thought they had some force and promised to see that they were brought to the attention of Mr. Cowles, the editor of Look. He had previously been looking at the article from a rather narrow security point of view, i.e., from the point of view of whether it contained "classified information." I said that I had not read it from that point of view and was not prepared to say whether it contained classified information. I pointed out that by law the Director of Central Intelligence was responsible for protection of intelligence sources and methods and that the Central Intelligence Agency therefore would be the proper place to have the article reviewed in that light. Nagel said that he believed that that had already been done.

My over-all impression is that Nagel did not take my arguments too seriously and that they will be outweighed in his mind by what he considers to be the value of "bringing the facts before the U.S. public" and by his personal attachment to his own handiwork. Another unfavorable factor is that the February 13 issue of Look is, as I understand it, scheduled to be put to bed in Des Moines this weekend and probably a major layout adjustment would be necessary if the article were to be deleted.

  
 William C. Trueheart

cc: CIA - Mr. Reber ✓  
 P - Mr. MacKnight

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Telephoned Mr. Gardner Cowles' secy, per Mr. [redacted] instructions, telling that the DCI had replied to Mr. Cowles ltr of 1/3---but that because of the time element, wanted to pass along the word that the DCI wanted Mr. Cowles to lunch with him, if convenient, at 1 PM Thursday, 1/11, here at the office -- and that if Mr. Richard Wilson is in the city, the DCI would also like him to join them. Address and building--and telephone number--given for ready reference. They will try to let us know Thurs if Mr. Wilson will be present.

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8 January 1951

Mr. Gardner Cowles  
LOOK Magazine  
511 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York

Dear Mike:

It was good of you to look into the "Intelligence Blunders" article. Having read it (as I have not), if you are convinced that it is constructive criticism, it would be difficult for me to argue to the contrary.

I am familiar with the unrevealed background of several of the instances usually cited as recent failures of U. S. intelligence, and I can say quite frankly that no one who is without this background and who must depend upon open sources for his information, could possibly be able to discuss competently whether or not any of them is real failure or blunder in obtaining information.

Aside from this, I view the matter in the same light as did Mr. Trueheart of the Department of State, who was consulted regarding the article in question by Mr. Nagel, who did the research for the author. Mr. Trueheart's brief comments are attached, and I hope you will read them. Then, after you have talked with Jackson and me on Thursday, you can determine whether or not the article would do more harm or good insofar as the interests of the U. S. are concerned. It is these overriding considerations that prompted me to bring this matter to your attention. We are not personally sensitive to criticism and neither Jackson, Dulles, nor I have been here long enough to have warmed our chairs.

If it is convenient to you, I suggest that you lunch with us here at the office at 1:00 P.M., on Thursday, 11 January. I should also like very much to have Mr. Wilson lunch with us if he is in Washington that day.

LEGIB

Faithfully,

*W B*  
WALTER B. SMITH  
DIRECTOR

*via Reg Mail  
ret receipt  
reg.  
receipt returned  
& destroyed.  
Press & Pub.*

*2cc. DCI only*

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"The general theme was that the United States had increased its expenditures for intelligence from about \$3 million per year prior to Pearl Harbor to \$300 million at the present time and now had 25,000-35,000 employees in the intelligence field. Despite all this, however, U. S. intelligence was still ineffective and while it had had isolated successes here and there (the breaking of the Japanese codes was cited), its record was by and large one of repeated failures. The bulk of the article was taken up with a recitation of alleged cases in point, including Bogota, the Chinese offensive last month and all the other standard illustrations with which I am familiar.

"I told Mr. Nagel it was my general view, and that of every other intelligence officer known to me, that publicity, whether good or bad, could only do harm to intelligence through making what is already an extremely hard job even more difficult. I said that whatever effect the article might have in this country, it would do us harm abroad and in two principal ways. First, it is a standard Soviet propaganda line that the United States is making a massive espionage effort against the Russian orbit. I felt sure that the Russians would lose no time in picking up and propagating this apparent confirmation from a reputable American publication. I felt that this could only hamper our efforts to gain support for U. S. policy abroad. Secondly, and more important, from the intelligence point of view, the effect of Russian propaganda use of the article could only be to alert further the Soviet Satellite population to the danger of foreign espionage and this in turn make our intelligence efforts to penetrate the Iron Curtain that much more difficult."

# Look • Quick • *Flair*

COWLES MAGAZINES, INC., LOOK BUILDING, 488 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

GARDNER COWLES, President

January 3, 1951

Dear Bedell,

It was nice to see you last evening, even briefly.

At the time you phoned me last week I had not read Richard Wilson's forthcoming LOOK article, OUR INTELLIGENCE BLUNDERS CAN DESTROY US. I have since read his article carefully. I have great confidence in your ability and in your judgment, so I disagree with Wilson's suggestion that perhaps CIA should be headed by a civilian. But with that major exception (which I want to see rephrased) I find myself substantially in agreement with Wilson. I feel that the article should run. I feel that the public should realize the confusion which has existed in our government in the Intelligence area during the past decade. I don't feel that the article is a criticism of you or of your work at CIA. It mainly deals with the past and with the growing importance of CIA as we attempt to operate all over the globe with our military and economic policies.

I just want to say this about Richard Wilson. He has been in Washington since 1932. He is a thoughtful and responsible correspondent. His colleagues apparently rate him highly because he has been President of the National Press Club and President of the Gridiron Club. President Roosevelt once told me he regarded Wilson as one of the half-dozen best correspondents in Washington. I have heard other similar compliments from various high officials in the Army, Navy, Air Force, State Department, etc. Since you apparently feel Wilson is wrong both in his facts and in his editorial conclusions, I'd deeply appreciate it if you would call him over to your office and discuss his article with him quite frankly. You can completely trust him. Unfortunately, Wilson is in Minneapolis this week, and will be in Des Moines for the forepart of next week, but he should be back in Washington on January 10 or 11.

I will be very happy to have lunch with you and Jackson on Thursday, January 11, when I am in Washington. I am going down with a group of businessmen to attend a conference Steelman has called at the White House. We could have lunch in my suite at the Carlton, at 1:00 o'clock on the 11th, if that would be a convenient time and place for you, or I will adjust my schedule to whatever you suggest, in the interest of saving your time.

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I am postponing publication of the Wilson article in order to give you a chance to discuss it. If Wilson is going to be back in Washington by the 11th, would you like me to have him present at our luncheon or would you and Jackson prefer to talk with me alone?

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mike".

General Walter Bedell Smith  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C.